

Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Program

RC&D is a unique USDA-NRCS program that helps rural areas promote wise use of natural resources, improve communities, and stimulate economic development.

There are nine RC&D areas in Alabama. NRCS administers the program, providing a coordinator and administrative support. A local council of citizens sets the priorities.

This past year, 157 local projects were completed at a cost of more than \$15 million. Nine councils received \$750,000 from the general fund budget.

Outreach

During FY2002, NRCS in Alabama made a concerted effort to reach new and existing customers across the state. Partnership activities included working with the following groups:

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts - to secure cost-share funds and educational programs for limited resource landowners.
- Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils - to explore financial assistance for community groups and organizations to enhance rural development.
- Alabama Small Farm and Rural Economic Development Center - to apply for mini-grants/outreach/research assistance to promote sustainability in rural groups and communities.
- Alabama Indian Affairs Commission - to foster assistance to the eight state-recognized tribes and one federally-recognized tribe in Alabama. Alabama NRCS signed an agreement with the federal Poarch Creek Indian tribe and is working on outreach assistance for the state-recognized tribes for FY2003.

Cost-Share Programs

Cost-share programs have been an important cornerstone of the Federal natural resource conservation effort for decades. They provide an incentive for farmers to participate in conservation programs by helping pay the expense of installing needed conservation practices. Many

state agencies or non-profit organizations request technical assistance from NRCS for cost-share programs.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

This voluntary conservation program addresses serious threats to soil, water, and related natural resources through contracts. In FY2002, there were 651 conservation plans/contracts prepared on over 160,000 acres. These contracts provided \$5,923,637 for Alabama farms. Alabama was able to fund only 55 percent of the total requests in FY2002. Some 530 requests totaling \$4,783,780 were not funded. Funding provided by the 2002 Farm Bill should be adequate to fund the majority of the requests. EQIP provides geographically targeted technical, financial, and educational assistance to maximize environmental benefits.

Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)

The state had good participation in FIP in FY2002. Over 553 landowners applied for funding totaling more than \$2.3 million. NRCS was able to fund 310 contracts for a cost-share value of \$957,988. Forestry practices were applied by 250 landowners.

Tree planting is needed on several million acres of forestland in the state and another 500,000 acres of openland could be planted to trees. Forest stand improvement is needed on over 1 million acres of forestland.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

This voluntary program helps people develop and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife on private lands. WHIP provides both technical assistance and cost-share funds through 10-year contracts. During FY2002, NRCS funded 44 contracts totaling \$212,000. Over 250 WHIP contracts are currently active in the state of Alabama.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

This program assists landowners that voluntarily restore and protect wetlands on private property by offering options of permanent easements, 30-year easements, and 10-year restoration cost-share agreements. Alabama has filed 15 WRP easements, including six perpetual and nine 30-year easements.

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Natural Resources Conservation Service Activities



“When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

--Aldo Leopold

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NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

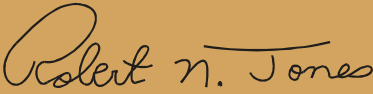
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Dear Fellow Conservationists:

I am proud to present 2002 highlights of the work of the Alabama Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Alabama is a beautiful state with an abundance of natural resources. It is our mission to conserve those natural resources. We have a long history of effective partnerships. To promote the conservation effort, we must maintain and build on the partnerships we have developed over the years. By working together, we have accomplished a great deal. The overall impact of our efforts for fiscal 2002 resulted in contacts with 228,669 landowners that applied practices on 296,920 acres of land.

NRCS has been in the conservation business for 70 years now. As an agency, NRCS is building on the successes of the past while working with new technologies to promote programs. As we work to protect one resource, we must consider the effects of our actions on other resources. Knowledge of soil, water, air, plants, animals, and humans and their interrelationships is the common denominator for successful conservation planning assistance. NRCS employees represent the diversity of our agency and our customers. It is clear that the Alabama NRCS employees have the kind of diversity that will help our agency continue to improve in its ability to meet the needs of all our cooperators.

Sincerely,



ROBERT N. JONES, State Conservationist

NRCS Mission

To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment.

NRCS Vision

Harmony between people and the land.

Farming—It’s Been a Good Life

Some folks refer to the region as the Wiregrass, but Martin Moates just calls it home. The farm in Coffee County has been his home for 76 years. He’s seen lots of changes in his lifetime. In 1943 he graduated from high school at age 16 and began farming. He planted his first 30-acre crop, consisting of peanuts, corn, and cotton, in 1944 using a mule and a plow. Chemicals for weed control and fertilizer for soil amendment were unknown to him.

After serving in the military, Mr. Moates came back to the 160-acre family farm, that was homesteaded in 1892, and married his high school sweetheart. The land was in very poor condition. In that era, it was customary to use the land until it was worn out.

Farming methods changed greatly after the war. Electricity became available in rural areas. Chemicals and mechanical equipment were emerging. Cultural farming practices changed. As Mr. Moates took over the family farm, he began making changes in the farming operation. He worked with NRCS (then the Soil Conservation Service) to improve the land. He utilized cost-share programs and made his land available for demonstrations to prove conservation practices. He became a supervisor for the Coffee County Soil and Water Conservation District in 1959. Mr. Moates says,

“My goal has been to be a link in the chain to help improve landuse problems in Coffee County. The technical assistance of NRCS has been invaluable and the availability of state cost-share funds made improvements to the land possible.”

The Moates’ determined early in their career that diversity was the key to success on the farm. They started a dairy business in 1947 with 6-8 cows. Today they milk 130 cows and farm 700 acres of row crops. “The dairy is my wife’s operation,” says Mr. Moates. Mrs. Moates and her assistant oversee the dairy operation. The products from the cows are what provides a steady income for the family and their employees.

Mr. Moates attributes his farming success to his ability to change and adapt, and to his good, strong, loyal employees. “Martin Moates is a good leader. He is a people person,” says Mike Harris, District Conservationist in Coffee County. Not only has Mr. Moates been a good leader on his own farm, but he has traveled all over the country to support and promote conservation efforts. “I’ve always done what I wanted to do,” says Mr. Moates. “If you haven’t delivered a calf and felt that warm sensation of new life, you haven’t lived.” A love of the land and pride in what he has accomplished has kept Mr. Moates focused. Farming—it’s been a good life.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NRCS employees serve all 67 counties from 56 field offices across the state. Fifty-five district conservationists lead the NRCS team within each of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Staffs are comprised of resource and soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, soil conservation and engineering technicians, and water management specialists. These employees work hand-in-hand with land users to conserve natural resources on private lands.

Program Summary

This annual report covers the fiscal year from October 1, 2001, to September 30, 2002. The following are highlights of our activities.

Small Watershed Program

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, Public Law 83-566 (Small Watershed Program) allows NRCS to join with local people to help plan and install projects that increase flood protection, control erosion, and enhance water quality, water supply, and water-related recreation.

During FY2002, NRCS signed contracts for two grade stabilization structures and one channel restoration project. In addition, three new long-term contracts (LTC’s) were written for the Sand Mountain-Lake Guntersville area and one for Wilkerson Creek Watershed.

NRCS obligated more than \$162,000 to the Small Watershed Program during FY2002.

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

EWP helps protect lives and property threatened by natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and wildfires. When a major disaster occurs, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to preserve life and property threatened by excessive erosion and flooding.

Almost \$33 million has been made available to Alabama through the EWP program during the past five years. Assistance is authorized by sections of Public Laws 81-516, 94-334, and 104-127.

During FY2002, NRCS obligated \$1,941,000 in Alabama for EWP projects resulting from heavy rainstorms in March and April. Local sponsors for these events included 17 county commissions and city governments. More than 43 sites will be protected using these EWP funds. An additional request for \$500,000 to address damages in Marion County has been submitted for funding.

Soil Survey Program

Modern soil survey reports are available in 36 of the 67 counties in Alabama. Interim reports are completed and are awaiting publication for three counties (Choctaw, Pickens, and Russell). Mapping is complete in four counties (Barbour, Hale, Macon, and Tallapoosa) and two special projects (Redstone Arsenal and Anniston Army

Depot). The maps are being compiled and the manuscripts are being written and edited for those counties and projects. Field mapping is complete in one update project (Houston County). Work is continuing on the manuscript and digitizing. Field mapping continues in four on-going survey projects (Bibb, Clarke, Coosa, and Crenshaw Counties). Mapping will be completed in Clarke County and mapping will begin in Washington County in 2003. One update project, Madison County, will begin in 2003. Four counties (Lamar, Lowndes, Washington, and Winston) have not yet been mapped. Sixteen counties have out-of-date or out-of-print surveys.

Macon County is in the process of being digitally map finished. Digital layers (hydrology and cultural) are being prepared and edited for Barbour and Hale Counties in preparation for digitizing.

Twenty-one soil surveys in Alabama are SSURGO (Soil Survey Geographic) certified, meeting all standards and specifications as described in the NRCS National Soil Survey Handbook, and are available in digital format. Covington, Geneva, and Montgomery Counties are in the certification process. Four counties (Barbour, Cherokee, Etowah, and Hale) are to be digitized in 2003. Map compilation, in preparation for digitizing and SSURGO certification, will begin on Autauga, Baldwin, DeKalb, Jackson, Lee, Marshall, Mobile, and Tuscaloosa Counties in 2003

Private Grazing Land Assistance

NRCS is a member of the Alabama Forage and Grassland Coalition that promotes grazing management and better forage quality. The Coalition sponsored the Alabama Grazing School and a Forage and Grassland Conference. During FY2002, more than 107 people attended two sessions of the grazing school and more than 200 attended the 3rd state-wide Forage and Grassland Conference.

Conservation Tillage

The use of conservation tillage in Alabama continues to increase. An FY2002 survey conducted by local conservation partners revealed that 40 percent (684,000 acres) of all crops grown in Alabama used some form of conservation tillage system. In 1989, only 16 percent (365,000 acres) were farmed using conservation tillage. The most significant increases have been in cotton production systems. Over 290,000 acres (49 percent) of the cotton grown in the state was farmed using residue management (conservation tillage) methods. The top 10 benefits of the conservation tillage system to farmers are: reduced labor and time, saved fuel, reduced wear on machinery, improved soil tilth, increased organic matter, saved soil moisture, reduced soil erosion, improved water quality, increased wildlife habitat, and improved air quality. As farmers apply this environmentally-friendly farming method and share their success stories with others, the use of conservation tillage will continue to increase.